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Actuality of the Murids and of Muridism
/Actualité des Mourides et du Mouridisme//

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*795 793 The brotherhood of the Murids was instituted in Senegal at the end of the last century by a Toucouleur /Tukolor/ marabout named Amadou Bamba M'Backé. He did it, Murid tradition reports, following a vision during which the Angel Gabriel revealed to him his vocation as apostle-restorer of Islam in that country.

Amadou Bamba had studied the Koran thoroughly under Cheikh /Sheik/ Sidi Sidiya, and because of this he had received the wird. He therefore was of Quadria obedience. Nevertheless, by creating his own brotherhood and founding Muridism, he produced a completely original work, and he knew particularly well how to adapt his preaching to the mentality of the Ouolof /Wolof/, among whom it spread rapidly and became firmly established.

The essential trait of the Murid is his blind and fanatical attachment to his marabout and to the Murid doctrine; the primordial characteristic of Muridism is to have made manual [461] labor (generally scorned in Black Africa and in Islam) the equivalent of prayer and, as such, capable of ensuring the eternal salvation of the disciple (talibé).

*795 114 The history of the vocation and the preachings of Amadou Bamba, as well as the circumstances of the birth and first development of the brotherhood are known; Captain Marty in L'Islam au Sénégal /Islam in Senegal/ and A. Gouilly in L'Islam en A. O. F. /Islam in French West Africa/ have spoken about it with authority.

Our purpose, therefore, will not be to repeat what has already been written about the Murids and their brotherhood, but to report some recent observations about them made by the author in the course of a stay at Diourbel during which he was able to approach the current leaders of the brotherhood frequently and to attend several times the pilgrimage that they organize annually in their "capital," Touba, under the name of Magal.

178 We shall call to mind, therefore, successively:

— Touba, the holy city of the Murids, its mosque, its Magal;

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128 — the great leaders of Muridism, their present situation, their influence on the movement, their reciprocal rivalries, their relations with the Administration;

— the importance of Muridism and its influence on the economic, social, and political life of Senegal.

/11/ Then we shall try, in conclusion, to envisage the prospects for the future which present themselves to Muridism today.

*795 778 [361] Touba is therefore the center of the Murid brotherhood. Amadou Bamba founded it in 1886, a few kilometers from the village of M'Backé (itself created by his grandfather, M'Balla M'Backé) and about 60 kilometers east of Diourbel, at the edge of Baol and the Ferlo desert, in a vast plain with bleak horizons and a sparse population.

The Murids attribute a holy and miraculous origin to the city, the Angel Gabriel himself having revealed the site to Amadou Bamba after conducting him there in a mysterious and supernatural fashion.

Amadou Bamba's difficulties with the Administration did not permit him to reside in this remote and isolated place where his activities were hard to control, but his body has reposed there since his death in 1927.

The agglomeration Touba-M'Backé-Darou forms the heart of the Murid country, and Touba is the ideal capital; indeed, it is now, for the disciples of Amadou Bamba:

— the headquarters of the brotherhood,

— a center of Koranic studies,

— a sort of monastery,

— a place of pilgrimage.

*795 793 It is at Touba that the Caliph-general resides. All of his collateral relatives and descendants, as well as all of the great Murid marabouts, have residences there, although they do not live there continually. It is there that the administrative council of the brotherhood meets to make important decisions concerning the Murid community.

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*795 [793] It is to Touba that the young Murids come to learn the Koran; each marabout there has his own school which forms his young talibés.

It is in Touba also that, grouped around their marabout (or his residence), the faithful dwell, those who wish to live a holier life in permanent contact with their religious leader and working each day for them and with them.

[788] [778] It is to Touba, finally, that every good Murid must go once a year in order to pray at the tomb of the founding saint of the brotherhood, at that of the khalife /caliph/, first successor, and especially in order to pay a visit to the present Caliph-general and to give him the offerings intended in particular for the continuation of the work on the mosque; this is the Magal of which we shall speak again below.

361 *795 /12/ The city appears like a great "escale" /commercial center/ of the bush. Wide avenues separate the vast carrés /compounds/ of the various marabouts from one another. A plan for division into lots was drawn up, but it has not yet been applied, Falilou M'Backé, the Caliph-general, having feared, at the last moment, the far-reaching consequences.

Touba is thus a great center. Its development and the considerable number of persons who come there for the Magal have [312] [496] necessitated special arrangements. Drillings have been made in order to ensure the water supply of the holy city, which is, moreover, linked to M'Backé and Diourbel by a railroad. On the other hand, no commercial establishment has settled in Touba, and the trading center has been fixed at M'Backé.

346 *795 Touba's center of attraction is its mosque, an Islamic monument unique in Senegal.

It was Amadou Bamba himself who decided to have it constructed, and in 1926 he asked his faithful to bring the first stones for it to Touba, but it was Amadou Mustapha, his son and first successor, who began the first work on it, after receiving by lease from the Administration a piece of ground of 400 hectares on which he could build it.

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*1795 346 The Murid talibés, faithfully carrying out the wish of their founder, continued to participate actively in the construction of the mosque, whether by working on it, by carrying stones to it, or by making to the Caliph-general gifts intended for the carrying on of the work; this goes on more or less rapidly according to the size of the funds which the caliph has at his disposal for carrying it out. It was very actively pushed between 1953 and 1957.

346 Thus, the edifice is now well along, the bulk of the work is finished, and its mass dominates the huts of Touba; from ten to 15 kilometers roundabout one sees its minarets, which signal to the fervent pilgrim as well as to the cruious traveler that they are approaching the holy city.

It is an important building of generous dimensions, with two minarets 30 meters high flanking the western façade; the great prayer room is surmounted by a cupola; small domes and lantern-lights contribute alike to the ornamentation of the roof.

Access is by a flight of steps located on the west façade. The latter is pierced by doors which open on a patio surrounded by a gallery opening on the courtyard by means of a colonnade with extended arches. The east side of the patio is not closed off and opens directly into the prayer room; this last is entirely /13/ covered, and the roof, as well as the cupola which surmounts it, is supported by rows of columns and extended arches of the purest Arab style, the appearance of which calls to mind the most famous mosques, such as the one of Córdoba, for example.

The mihrab is formed by a little chapel built into the east wall of the mosque at the back of the prayer room.

The building is of reinforced concrete. Even though the greatest part of the work is ended, much still remains to be done before it is finished. In 1956 the plastering had not yet been done, and then it will be necessary to paint and decorate the walls and columns, as has already been done for the lanterns which surmount the minarets and which are ornamented with symbolic decorations or arabesques.

/13 cont./

346 These minarets have been finished since 1956, and one can climb to their summits, from where one discovers the panorama of Touba and the surrounding plain.

346 From the mosque there is direct access to the tomb of
778 Amadou Bamba, which is in a mausoleum built into the north-east corner of the building beside the great prayer room. The tomb proper (covered by velvet hangings embroidered with Koranic sayings stitched into arabesques) is in the middle of the mausoleum; it is surrounded by wrought-iron grillwork which keeps visitors at a distance, while at the same time allowing many of them to contemplate the saint's tomb. The ground all around the tomb is covered with fine, sifted sand, replaced continually to keep it clean.

The tomb of the first caliph, Amadou Moustapha, is located outside the mosque on the east façade several meters from the wall. The mausoleum resembles a little bungalow; one enters it directly from the outside, without going through the mosque. Here, too, the tomb is hidden behind embroidered hangings.

These places are redolent of an atmosphere of contemplation.
[782] The air is heavy with the perfume of the incense burned constantly before the tombs.

*795 At Touba, the great Moslem religious celebrations are par-
796 ticularly prominent. Thus the faithful come from quite far away (when they can) in order to celebrate at Touba rather than elsewhere the Corytée, the Tabaski, or the Gamou (1).

1. These three celebrations correspond respectively to the Aid el Fitr, the Aid el Kebir, and the Mouloud of Islamic tradition.

But the great celebration of Touba, the specifically Murid
[788] solemnity /14/ which every good talibé tries to attend every year if possible, is the Magal.

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*795 796 788 The first Magal took place October 19, 1928, at the initiative of Amadou Moustapha and on the occasion of the anniversary of the death of Amadou Bamba.

Since Falilou M'Backé, the second caliph, took over the leadership of the brotherhood, the Magal has changed in date and meaning. It now commemorates Amadou Bamba's return from exile, his prophetic vision, and his permanent establishment at Diourbel. Thus the second caliph linked his action directly to that of the Founder by giving back to the Magal its original meaning, desired as early as 1912 by Amadou Bamba himself when he instituted, with an identical signification, what was then called the second Tabaski.

Since 1928 this manifestation has not ceased to grow in importance, and today more than 200,000 pilgrims go to Touba each year on this occasion.

The pilgrimage lasts three days, although some fanatics often remain for five days, sometimes eight.

The high point is the second day; the last is called the "official day," because then the caliph speaks in public to the pilgrims, before the representatives of authority whom he has invited.

[484] A week before this "official day," the first pilgrims begin to arrive at Touba; their number increases rapidly and progressively as the opening date for the pilgrimage proper approaches.

484 494 788 During these days the pilgrims arrive in the holy city by every means: on foot or by cart for the nearest ones; by train, truck, and taxi for those farther away. Whatever vehicle is used, it is always overloaded: eight or ten ride in a sightseeing car; 90 (and even a few more) in a truck which should carry only 50 persons (this is a matter of four- to five-ton trucks, not covered, on which the travelers crowd together, standing up and pressed against one another between the railings, like canned fish). The trains, too, are jammed, and there are as many [497] pilgrims on the roofs and bumpers of the cars as inside.

Traffic is thick, but in spite of the conditions, there are few accidents, at least serious accidents, considering the great

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484 494 number of persons transported. There are sometimes spectacular ones, but cases involving fatalities are fortunately very rare.

788 [497] The transportation of the pilgrims is closely watched by the /15/ Administration. The Office of Railroads organizes special trains. The subdivision heads grant to the owners of the trucks special transportation authorizations. The circle /cercle, an administrative district/ of Diourbel, aided by the Senegal government, strengthens the security forces and highway police.

788 *795 But that is not the only problem which the organization and unfolding of the Magal presents for the Caliph-general and the Administration.

[485] Sheltering all these people for three days and more is another. The provisioning of the pilgrims in water and food must be organized; sanitary and medical service must be ensured; finally, it is necessary to ensure order and discipline in [625] the city of Touba itself, as is done on the roads, and the commander of the circle of Diourbel can only accomplish this with sizable police reinforcements, set apart in advance almost everywhere (as far as Dakar and Kaolack), which are put at his disposal for this purpose.

At the opening of the pilgrimage, three days before the Official Day, the crowd has reached its maximum size. Touba [494] then experiences extraordinary activity. The road between Touba and M'Backé is continually furrowed in both directions by files of trucks which run without respite between the two agglomerations. The station platforms disappear under the flood of pilgrims who disembark innumerably from the last trains. The wide avenues of the city are filled with the crowd [438] of pilgrims who carry out their religious duties or stroll in front [443] of the little flat baskets where, as in all pilgrimages in the world, the most diverse objects are sold, from articles of clothing, such as babouches or samaras, to perfumes and jewelry, including the most varied articles of piety: prayers or verses from the Koran printed in Arabic, photographs of the Caliph-general or of Amadou Bamba, or even pictures in Oriental

/15 cont./

788 style, violently colored like our Épinal pictures and representing
*795 the holy places of Islam or personages of Koranic tradition.
[438] Finally, to complete this immense and noisy fair over which
[443] floats an impalpable dust, there, in a corner of the city not far from the mosque, are the keepers of the cook-shops: they cook
[065] in the open the appetizing dishes which they will offer at modest prices to the famished pilgrims.

Evening does not slow down these activities; on the contrary, the pilgrims regroup at the homes of the various marabouts, and sessions of religious songs are organized there. They will
[533] last far into the night, which will resound until dawn with these litanies amplified by numerous loud-speakers.

/16/ In the course of this pilgrimage, the believers have several obligations to fulfill:

1) to call on the Caliph-general,

2) to go to meditate at the tomb of Amadou Bamba and that of Amadou Moustapha,

3) to visit the mosque,

4) to go to see their own marabout,

5) to visit at the cemetery the Sacred Tree and the graves
[778] of certain deceased notables of the brotherhood.

At the entrance to the carré of the Caliph, the faithful, in a long line, patiently await their turn to go into the residence of their supreme spiritual leader.

After passing through several walls (at the gate of which are talibé-cashiers who claim their offerings from them), they arrive at the hut in which the Caliph receives.

The circle guards maintaining order have them enter one by one into the straw hut where Falilou awaits them, assisted by his secretary and some of his close collaborators. Each pilgrim kneels before the Caliph while presenting to him his offering (hadia), which the sérigne will immediately have passed on to one of his followers. The pilgrim then rises and goes out in order to give his place to another.

His visit to the Caliph ended, he goes to the sacred tombs
[778] of Amadou Bamba and Amadou Moustapha.

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788 *795 798 At the tomb of the Master there is always a pious crowd whose meditation, even though sincere, allows the joy at being in so famous and holy a place to show through. If they can, the pilgrims walk around the tomb three times while reciting the consecrated formula: "In the name of God the Clement, the Merciful. May God bless our Lord Mohammed, the Envoy of God, and save him." Then each of them puts down his mite and takes a handful of the sand surrounding the base of the tomb, [789] which is regarded as a powerful talisman capable of extricating the one who possesses it from every difficult situation.

On the tomb of Amadou Moustapha the pilgrim meditates and leaves a small offering, but does not pick up any sand.

One does not leave these holy places without spending a moment in the mosque.

The latter, during the whole pilgrimage, never empties; people come and go, chat there, and rest there. It is no longer a place of prayer and meditation; for the moment it is a work-yard which one visits, rather than a sacred monument where one meditates, but, the visit ended, one returns from there proud of knowing the greatest mosque in Senegal, proud of having climbed to the top of its minarets.

/17/ Upon leaving there, the pilgrims go, in groups or alone, to the home of the marabout to whom they are directly attached, and they also take an offering to him.

The last trip of the pilgrimage is the visit to the cemetery. This is laid out around the Sacred Baobab (Goui Tékhé), at the foot of which Amadou Bamba had the supernatural vision "of the fish which supports the world," indicating to him that he had indeed arrived at the place where he was to build Touba. A little enclosure marks the site where he had that vision. The most educated and the most pious pilgrims meditate and pray there; the others, and especially the women, content themselves with visiting the graves, particularly those of Aminata Lo, wife of the Founder and mother of Amadou Moustapha, of Babacar M'Backé, son of the Sérigne Bamba, dead at an early

/17 cont./

788 age, of Massamba and M'Bara M'Backé, half brothers /on the
*795 father's side/ of the same Sérigne. They will go also to the
778 graves of the first marabouts of the brotherhood and of the first disciples of the Master, Ali Touré, Ibrahima Sarr, Assana N'Diaye, and they will stop longer at that of the beloved disciple, Ibra Fall, at the entrance of which is planted the hir, the historic stake with which was marked the site of the tomb of Amadou Bamba after the miraculous vision which we mentioned above.

There, too, in front of each grave, talibé-cashiers do not stop soliciting the generosity of the pilgrims.

788 When these ritual visits are over, the talibé is purified and
*795 sanctified. If he has any time left, it is possible for him to go back to the city and mingle with the crowd of pilgrims. He can also collaborate in the construction of the mosque by breaking pieces of laterite (huge piles of which are to be found near the mosque and are used in the making of the concrete) ... [785] unless he lingers to watch some fanatic of the Murid branch of the M'Baye Fall devote himself to flagellation exercises ... with a millet pestle.

At sundown he will participate with all the pilgrims in the [782] salam du Maghreb (evening prayer); this is the only moment in the day when the 200,000 pilgrims assemble in front of the mosque for a common prayer.

The last day of the pilgrimage is thus the "Official Day." It is called this because the Caliph invites to it all the personalities and all the authorities of the circle of Diourbel, of Senegal, of the Government-general, of the official as well as of the private milieus. All accept this invitation, and those who cannot attend send representatives.

This day essentially requires an official ceremony which takes place in the middle of the morning. The Caliph, escorted /18/ by his most notable guests and followed by the crowd of the others, makes his way to a platform sheltered by canopies and erected in the plaza of the mosque, on which everyone

/18 cont./

788 *795 settles himself. Speeches are then made by the representatives of the authorities and by the Caliph. The latter in his response exalts in general the friendship of France for Islam, assures our country of his faithfulness and affection, and invites his faithful to conduct themselves like good Moslems, like pious disciples of Amadou Bamba, and like loyal and good citizens, thus emphasizing the good understanding which now prevails between the brotherhood and the French administration.

After this ceremony the Magal is ended; while, on the stroke of noon, the Caliph-general is offering an abundant and sumptuous repast to his guests, the first departures of the pilgrims take place. All during the afternoon a large number of faithful arrive home. But those who can do not leave immediately, so that for two to three more days the jammed trains and the overloaded trucks will take back to their villages talibés who are indeed tired, but happy about their pilgrimage and singing the praises of God, the Prophet, and Amadou Bamba.

The Magal is therefore a big affair. When his guests have departed, when the pilgrims have gone home, in the city rid of its cloud of dust, in the silence finally found again with the taking down of the many loud-speakers which broadcast the religious songs and the prayers in the compounds of the priests and around the mosque, Falilou M'Backé can draw up the balance-sheet of this manifestation.

[793] The Magal allows the brotherhood to measure its strength and cohesion; it permits its members to approach the Caliph-general, who, for them, is a saint whose only goal is to realize down here the wishes of Amadou Bamba. Finally, it permits their supreme leader to measure their faithfulness to his person and their attachment to the brotherhood. The one and the other are still very solid and strong nowadays, since the amount of the gifts collected at the last few Magal is on the order of 150,000,000 CFA francs.

A manifestation of the vitality of Muridism, the Magal is also a Senegalese event; many people who are not Murids go

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788 *795 to it out of curiosity, but do not fail to be touched by the strength and cohesion of Muridism, and sometimes some of them become disciples of Amadou Bamba.

Besides, the repercussions of the pilgrimage go beyond the bounds of Touba and the brotherhood. The local press, the [204] [207] official information services, and Radio-Dakar attend and participate in it. Radio reporting, newspapers, and films spread sonorous echoes and vivid images of the Magal, not only throughout the Territory, /19/ but throughout the Federation, and this contributes no little toward increasing the glory and prestige of the brotherhood and its leaders in Senegal.

793 *795 If the Magal has assured this character and this importance, it is thanks to the present head of the brotherhood, Falilou M'Backé, and, reciprocally, the aspect thus assumed by this pilgrimage has been one of the elements which have established the second Caliph at the head of the brotherhood.

Actually, at the time of his nomination as Caliph-general, he had to overcome the opposition of his nephew, Cheikh M'Backé, son of Moustapha (who aspired to succeed the latter as he had succeeded his father, Amadou Bamba), whom the council of the Murids had removed from the succession for his benefit.

By directly tying again the tradition of the Magal to the first intentions of Amadou Bamba, he brought about the unity of the Murids around himself.

He has also devoted himself to the building of the mosque, to which he applies all his attention. Not only does he collect for this purpose considerable sums at the time of the Magal, but he also seizes every opportunity to make collections or to have collections made for the benefit of this work. In particular he [533] has his representatives organize throughout the territory night sessions of religious singing in the course of which funds for the mosque are collected.

Thus he has appeared, in the eyes of the Murids, less as the successor to Amadou Moustapha than as the direct continuater

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793 ¥795 of Amadou Bamba. He has thus surmounted the difficulties of the beginning of his caliphate and has become and remained the venerated and uncontested leader of the brotherhood, even for those of the Murids who are in the direct obedience of Cheikh M'Backé.

Falilou M'Backé resides permanently in Touba very near the mosque, which is therefore, along with the general leadership of the brotherhood, his principal concern. He seldom leaves the holy city, where he lives in a very large carré, with installations, with multiple huts, and the tapades (walls) of which, in a complicated design, jealously hide the life of the [342] occupants. Most of these huts are made of clay and roofed with thatch; some larger ones, roofed with metal, well-built, and comfortably furnished, are used for putting up guests of note. According to a custom common among the Murid marabouts, he had a kind of office made for himself (where he receives his important visitors) in a plank hut built by those of his talibés who are carpenters and woodworkers.

/20/ Of medium height, robust, active in spite of his age, the second caliph has the bearing of a rural head of a family; in addition, he has the shrewdness, wisdom, and tenacity of the peasant. His conversation, like his whole person, is stamped with moderation, gentleness, and goodness. His cares are often of a material order (construction of the mosque, good management of the brotherhood, yield of his plantations, etc....), but preoccupations of an intellectual, moral, and spiritual order are not foreign to him. Simple images and a certain Oriental emphasis give an individual and personal style to his conversations.

As far as the Administration is concerned, he is a level-headed and calm leader whose loyalty it can count on. He is an element of order and thoughtfulness who will be hostile toward untried ventures and dangerous innovations. Besides, he knows that the Administration widely supported and favored his candidacy for the caliphate. He therefore has no reason to create difficulties for it.

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793 *795 The Caliph-general seldom leaves Touba. He sends representatives to the chief town or to the circles to visit his talibés or to deal with administrative questions in the offices. If he goes away, he rarely goes far; in general, he goes as far as his groundnut plantations located a few kilometers from Touba. There he calls on the talibés, who, according to Murid doctrine, work for him while he himself prays for them and in their place. These plantations give him the millet necessary for feeding the people who live with him in Touba, and groundnuts whose sale will assure him of sizable personal revenues.

Immediately after Falilou M'Backé at the head of the brotherhood come his brother, Bassirou M'Backé, and his nephew, Cheikh M'Backé, about whom we have already said a few words just above. Since 1947 these two Sérignes have been, respectively, Vice-President and Secretary of the Murid Administrative Council which Falilou created to manage the funds intended for the construction of the mosque, and of which he is President.

Bassirou is regarded in principle as the "dauphin" of the brotherhood, the designated and legitimate successor to Falilou. He is very different from his brother. Tall, thin, with a long face and regular features, Bassirou has a great deal of presence and fine bearing. He studied at Boutilimit during the lifetime of Cheikh Sidiya Baba. Very cultivated and well-read, his conversation is as interesting as it is agreeable.

In spite of the important position that he occupies at the head of the brotherhood, he does not appear to maintain either excellent relations or very frequent contacts with his brother.

In 1953 he came to settle in Diourbel after definitely leaving /21/ Boulel in the subdivision of Kaffrine, where he had been making tests of mechanical and motorized cultivation in the Bloc Expérimental de l'Arachide /Experimental Bloc [654] for Groundnuts/ in co-operation with the Service de l'Agriculture and thanks to the manpower of his talibés.

He is now imam of the Diourbel mosque, whose restoration [346] he would like to undertake. It is actually a very beautiful

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793 *795 [347] building which does not have the importance of the Mosque of Touba, but which surpasses in elegance the other mosques of Senegal, and which, because of this, would merit having made on it the necessary and urgent repairs which certain parts that are very damaged and in very bad condition require at present.

But Bassirou does not have only this architectural interest; he is also concerned with crops. His experience with the Service de l'Agriculture not having given him satisfaction, he works in a more classical and traditional fashion near the village of Tip, located in the canton of Kaël some 30 kilometers to the south of Touba. This installation did not fail to provoke some protests on the part of the Peul stockbreeders of the canton, but these difficulties seem to have been settled amicably later on.

The third person in the brotherhood in the order of precedence is, as we have said, Cheikh M'Backé, eldest son of Amadou Moustapha and nephew of the two preceding men. Much younger than his uncles, he also has a very different demeanor. A tall, well-built, handsome, clean-shaven man, he has the bearing and the activities of a modern businessman. In fact, he is ambitious; he wants to succeed; he needs a great deal of money in order to realize his ambitions, and his very functions as a Murid marabout provide it for him.

We have seen that he had solicited, as the direct descendant of the founder, the post of caliph, but that he had been ousted in favor of his uncle. Since then he has always remained in more or less violent opposition to Falilou M'Backé. Nevertheless, he has not succeeded in detaching from the latter even a small fraction of the Murids. His opposition has sometimes been the cause of regrettable acts. In 1952, among others at the time of the elections to the Territorial Assembly, Cheikh M'Backé had made himself the champion of the S.F.I.O. when Falilou was supporting the B. D. S. (and undoubtedly because he was supporting it). This opposition provoked rather violent incidents in Touba during the electoral campaign, some talibés

666 798 *795

/21 cont./

793 of Cheikh, supporting the S. F. I. O., having gone so far as
*795 to throw stones into the "carré" of the Caliph-general. Cheikh
[666] had to restrain the socialist ardor of his talibés, who had gone too far. Such actions risk alienating from him the brotherhood /22/ and even the Administration, but he needs both in order to continue to carry on his policy.

His residence in Touba is located near the mosque, but on the opposite side from that of the Caliph-general. On the day of the Magal he tries to assemble there the greatest possible number of talibés in order to show his influence.

The cultivation of groundnuts is for him, too, an important source of revenue. His principal plantations are located at Taïf in the subdivision of Gossas, not far from the limits of that of M'Backé.

The other members of the M'Backé family have less influence on the life of the brotherhood. Nevertheless, they hold positions on the Murid Administrative Council, and they are settled around Touba and M'Backé.

[801] M'Backé Bousso heads an important Koranic school at Darou-Salam, just beside M'Backé. Abdoulaye M'Backé has settled at Boulel-Mody, at the extremity of the former valley of the
[312] Sine where, thanks to the permanent waterholes that exist at
[241] certain places in this dried-up thalweg, he has created rice-fields and orchards which complement his groundnut plantations, in the midst of which he lives. Modest and self-effacing in appearance, this M'Backé is in reality very rich and very influential, for he has as talibés principally salaried workers and city employees who send him a tithe from their salaries or their income.

Following the example of the direct descendants and collateral relatives of Amadou Bamba, his distant relatives, his allies, the descendants of his first collaborators have made themselves "Great Murid Marabouts." Spiritual and temporal leaders at the same time, instructing their disciples in the doctrine of the founder, and above all having them till the soil for them, these Sérignes have created in Baol and in adjacent

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793 regions veritable villages of which they are practically the
*795 chiefs and the imams.

One of the most remarkable of these men, settled thus in the subdivision of Diourbel, is Mamadou Khabane M'Backé, a big producer of groundnuts and a big businessman. Sérigne Tacko and Sérigne Mamadou Mahmoune, son of Cheikh Anta, and Sérigne Awa M'Balla M'Backé live in about the same fashion. All of these marabouts have a direct influence on a variable number of talibés, for whom they are, in a way, "guides of conscience" and who are attached through them to the Caliph-general. Finally, let us mention the marabout of Darou-Kafour, settled in a little village on the road from Diourbel to M'Backé, who lives modestly in a small establishment. He does not raise crops on a large scale; he devotes himself in particular to directing his Koranic school, /23/ and
[734] he has made a specialty of caring for the insane. By his gentleness and patience he succeeds in curing the ones whom the Service de Santé /Health Service/ has given up keeping and treating.

793 The Murid brotherhood is thus thoroughly staffed and
*795 directed by all these marabouts who truly have their talibés
795 in hand and who hold them all the better because they bring them a simple and practical solution to the problem, distressing for every man: "What will become of me after death?" .... Every Murid knows that if he has worked for his marabout and has given him a tithe from his goods and income, he will go directly to Paradise, for his marabout, in exchange for his work and gifts, prays for him and will save him without his having to concern himself about his salvation, even if he has gravely sinned.

*795 It is this complete hold that the Murid marabouts have
793 over their disciples which originally caused the brotherhood to be regarded as dangerous and which, joined to the ambitions of Amadou Bamba, provoked difficulties and collisions with the Administration. By now this mistrust and opposition have given

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793 *795 way to a frank and full collaboration between the representatives of authority and the Murid leaders of all ranks.

*795 631 793 The effective and efficient discipline which prevails in the brotherhood permits exercising over those under its jurisdiction a kind of indirect administration, always easier to achieve than direct administration. This formula was used especially from 1940 to 1946 when it was a question of producing the utmost quantities of groundnuts. This collaboration between the Murid marabouts and the Governors did away with many reticences and prejudices and had the result of increasing the prestige and influence of the former, not only within the brotherhood, but also in all of Senegal.

793 *795 652 631 Today this collaboration perhaps has a few more nuances, but it remains important. Relations between the heads of administrative divisions and the Murid marabouts are always very polite and very close; the marabouts receive sizable economic and financial aid from the Administration. The Sociétés de [654] Prévoyance /Welfare Societies/ advance them large tonnages of groundnut seed. Then again, short-term and long-term agricultural credits are granted to them, either for putting into good condition each of the agricultural fields (wintering credits) or to allow them to modernize or mechanize their cultivation; finally, administrative subsidies are also given for the construction of the Mosque of Touba. On the other hand, the marabouts preach to their talibés respect for established authority /24/ and call upon them to do their duty vis-à-vis Administration, notably in whatever concerns the payment of taxes and the reimbursements for the seed to the Sociétés de Prévoyance.

*795 162 The Murids thus have an important place in the life of Senegal. Their number is estimated at 400,000, which represents a quarter of the Islamized population of the territory. One quarter of the brotherhood is established in the circle of Diourbel and two other quarters are distributed in the regions adjacent to the circles of Kaolack, Thiés, Louga, and Linguère, that is to say, the Murids have remained closely grouped around [793] their land of origin, Baol. They live there for the most part in

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* 795 793 [62] farming villages (dara) which the marabouts have established in the bush, sometimes at the expense of non-Murid native villages. The tonnages of groundnuts which they produce there can bring their marabout more than a million CFA francs a year, provided that each one has about a hundred talibés (which is not out of the ordinary) to work for him. If one remembers that the talibés who do not work directly for the marabout pay him a tithe from their salaries and their income, one can easily realize the financial facilities which a Murid religious leader can enjoy.

The faithful do not object at all to thus feeding the treasury of their Sérigne ... on the contary!

Here is a little anecdote which will prove that even the poorest do it readily and willingly:

One day, a "Great Marabout" crossing Diourbel in his Chrysler stopped in an avenue of the city to greet the subdivision head whom he had just passed and to exchange a few words with him. Just beside them, at the foot of a mango tree on the edge of the avenue, an old woman was settled, selling fruit on a wretched basket. As soon as the "commander" had left, this old woman approached the car, whose occupant she had recognized, and at the same time as she paid her respects to him gave him the money that she had with her, perhaps all of her meager receipts for the morning.

This explains why it is that the representatives of the marabouts who go from city to city collecting from the disciples who do not till the soil for the benefit of their patrons never come back empty-handed, and that the Murid officials would never go to the Magal without bringing to their marabouts substantial gifts, in money or in kind, to allow them to organize the receptions they give on this occasion in their Touba residences.

As a consequence of this, one will not be surprised at the lavishness of the way of life that at least some, if not all, of the Murid "Great Marabouts" can lead. They live in /25/ modern, in truth luxurious establishments, a permanent house,

/25 cont./

*795 refrigerator, radio, power plant, powerful American cars, etc
793 .... Certain ones even own real estate in Dakar which they rent for a good price, increasing their revenues by that much more.

If this standard of living is the result of the attachment and the fanatical work of the talibés, reciprocally this luxury increases their prestige in the eyes of these same talibés. These simple people see in this exterior wealth a sign of the greatness, power, and glory of their marabout. They are proud to see him rich and influential, as if they themselves participated in this wealth and influence.

Still another anecdote will underline, it seems, this blind admiration of the faithful for their religious leaders in spite of (and perhaps because of) the exterior signs of their wealth.

The domestic servant of a European official had accompanied his employer to Touba, to the home of Failou M'Backé. Thus he could enter the carré of "his" marabout (for he was a Murid). Upon returning, he said to his employer in a tone of sincere admiration and without a critical afterthought: "My [352] marabout is a great marabout; his carré has many bedrooms [513] and in each bedroom there is a good bed." When one knows that the majority of the Blacks usually sleep on wretched pallets or even on mats, and that to possess a good bed is one of the first objectives of the African who advances, one will appreciate the full value of this remark...

793 After that no one will be surprised that some people have
*795 labeled as "servitude" the situation which the Murid marabouts
244 reserve for the talibés who work on their plantations. They are,
555 in fact, grouped in teams of ten to 20, and each team has a piece of land to cultivate. Of course the teams compete zealously to bring to the marabout the handsomest harvest. The zeal of the teams is all the greater because each member can hope, if the marabout notices his own zeal, to be initiated at the end of several years to the Murid dikr and to have in his turn a Murid village to superintend. He can even hope to have assigned to him a new area to be attached to the brotherhood

/25 cont./

793 and to receive the title of Cheikh, with the advantages which
* 795 that confers. While waiting, he works at hoeing and clearing
244 land without counting or measuring all the lands capable of pro-
[555] ducing the groundnuts which make up the fortune of his mara-
bout.

It is this way of colonizing the lands, and more particularly the new lands, which has made the brotherhood play an important role in the economy of Senegal in recent years. The Murid marabouts have been and remain clearers /26/ of land and large-
[433] scale producers of groundnuts. It can be estimated that they alone produce a little more than half of the total harvest of the Territory.

793 This brilliant picture is nevertheless not without shadows.
* 795 Even though the influence of the Murid leaders is not dangerous
518 on the political level as a consequence of the good understanding which exists between them and the Administration, even though there is no reason to fear that they may incite the members of the brotherhood to insubordination, their presence in the villages does pose problems. There are problems when they have settled in villages whose chiefs are not Murids (if not, sometimes, anti-Murid). In these cases it often happens that there are collisions
[627] between the customary chiefs and the Murid marabouts, principally since the reforms of 1945 which diminished considerably the powers of the chiefs and their prestige in the eyes of the people at a time when the influence and glory of the marabouts were
[632] increasing. Many times the Murids of a canton want to obey only their religious leader and willfully ignore the canton chief. In addition, in the face of the invading agricultural activity of the Murids, the non-Murid populations stiffen themselves more and more and try to resist their agrarian encroachments. That sometimes creates quarrels; indeed it even provokes violent disorders which have to be arbitrated or stopped.

793 On the other hand, the recent political evolution which is
* 795 resulting in giving the right to vote to all Senegalese men and
666 all Senegalese women has prompted the politicians to seek the collaboration and friendship of the Murid leaders... so that they

/26 cont./

793 will have their talibés vote in favor of their parties. When one
*795 knows what the influence of the marabouts and the discipline
666 of the brotherhood are, one can easily imagine what a formidable ace such an alliance can be for a party. But to be allied with one party is necessarily to be the adversary of the other (or others). If Murid fanaticism (and organization) is thrown into the electoral struggles, it can be the cause of serious troubles. Certainly these troubles would not compromise the loyalty of the brotherhood vis-à-vis the mother country, but they would create serious difficulties for the local administration and the government of the territory.

793 In other respects, deeper reasons can provoke lively op-
*795 position or even struggles between the great Murid leaders and
[665] certain politicians (or certain parties). Thus some Senegalese political personalities are beginning to criticize the way the marabouts act against their talibés. One of them has gone so far as to utter the words "servitude" and "feudalism" in speaking of Muridism /27/ to a high European official. It is certain that a virulent campaign could be made on this theme against the Murid leaders and especially against those whose ostentatious luxury can excite jealousy.

For their part, the Murid marabouts try to maintain their authority and their influence over their disciples and, in that way, over the whole country. They will be opposed to any social or political innovation which will give more power to the masses, and which, by so doing, will risk compromising their authority, counterbalancing it, or even combatting it.
[654] They were thus hostile in 1953 to the transformation of the Société de Prévoyance of Baol into the Société Mutuelle de Production Rurale, on the one hand, because they thought that authority should not be entrusted to the people, and, on the other hand, because they feared that a S. M. P. R. presided over by an African (as was happening already at the time in the circle of Thiès) might be less favorable toward them than the traditional S. P. completely in the hands of the Administration.

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*795 These political rivalries which are being outlined are in part caused by the social consequences of Muridism.

It has often been reproached (in the Senegalese world) for turning the young people, not only against traditional cults and brotherhoods, but also against their families and, in a general way, against their customary framework. As a matter of fact, all of the talibés who work on behalf of the Murid marabouts are young men who have, properly speaking, deserted their villages and their families in order to be Murids and only Murids. If they later return to their natal villages, it is to act as a kind of militant, missionaries, who wish absolutely to convert these villages to the Murid faith.

If one adds to this that the way in which the talibés are treated and trained is not very educative, if one notes that the organization of the work of the plantations and of its productivity is effectively very close to pure and simple exploitation of the Murid workers, one will admit that the social organization of Muridism is not exempt from all criticism.

*795 249 241 One might think that, even if Murid fanaticism has drawbacks from the social point of view, it gives, at least on the economic level, some remarkable results. It has given a taste for agricultural work to a large part of the Senegalese population, and it has opened great areas, previously uncultivated, for the cultivation of the groundnut. Unfortunately, a more thorough study of /28/ this question makes us fear that the way in which the Murids exploit their groundnut planting nowadays may be a danger for the economic future of the country.

An important report of an agricultural mission devoted to this problem an entire chapter which shows all the drawbacks of this extensive and destructive single-crop cultivation aimed solely toward an immediate material profit, and which it does not hesitate to call "pillage economy." Indeed, in his desire to harvest groundnuts for the profit of his marabout, the talibé, who is not a peasant, spoils the land. He clears land without any consideration at all; he destroys the trees and especially the caddes, so precious for the land of Senegal. He exhausts

/28 cont./

* 795 244 241 the soil, since he practices neither rotation nor fallowing, since he does not utilize either animal fertilizers (he is not at all a stock-breeder), chemical fertilizers, or green fertilizer... and each time that he abandons lands which he has completely (and for a long time to come) exhausted, in order to bring new lands into this devastating cycle, the desert advances behind him. All this is all the more serious because the cultivation undertaken by the Murid talibés has a yield 30 per cent lower than that of the cultivation done by the Black true peasants, and notably the Sérère /Serer/ peasants.

In short, this report regards the Murid as "a ravager of forests and land, and a squanderer of the riches of the territory."

* 795 The author of the report does not stop, however, at these violent criticisms and pessimistic conclusions. According to him (and he is right), the Murid fact does exist and will exist for a long time to come, even if the brotherhood were to split up for reasons of personal and internal rivalries. The different fragments would retain the same spirit and the same methods; one would not see the end of Muridism, but its continuation in different and rival sects.

So he proposes channeling the Murid fanaticism, reforming it, and improving its methods of work and production by acting upon the great Murid leaders themselves and by making them understand the necessity of these reforms and improvements. He adds that Falilou M'Backé is an "intelligent man" who willingly recognizes that many improvements could be made in the present agricultural technique of the Murids and who even thinks that this modernization could only strengthen the vitality of the brotherhood.

Besides, there is every reason to believe that the other leaders of Muridism and most of the "Great Marabouts" will follow the example of the Caliph-general and will understand very quickly (if it can be demonstrated to them) the necessity of avoiding thoughtless clearing /29/ and of replanting caddes where they have been cut down, of using green and chemical fertilizers, indeed of taking an interest in stock-raising and

/29 cont./

*795 using animal fertilizers. The very solidity of the Murid hierarchy would make instructions and directives in this direction very effective if the leaders and the great marabouts were willing to give them to their talibés.

But this evolution should not be limited solely to the economic sphere.

To meet the criticisms of the politicians and the more advanced people, it is to be hoped, in the interest of the brotherhood itself, that the Murid leaders will orient themselves toward a new conception of their moral and social doctrine.

Making men work for almost nothing, while in exchange being content to assure them of eternal life and happiness after their death, can look like a swindle to any advanced man. It would be very difficult to put in the wrong those who might violently attack the brotherhood by standing on this argument.

It does not seem that such attacks can be unleashed at present with effectiveness; the time has not yet come, it seems, when political leaders will thus stand up against the Murid leaders and Muridism. Not only are the brotherhood and its leaders still very powerful, but, above all, they represent, better, they are, Islam; now every Senegalese, whatever his political ideas may be, is first of all Moslem, and he clings to his marabouts. It would be difficult to make him accept seeing venerated religious leaders attacked in the public square.

But evolution goes quickly and a day will come when men brought up on the political, syndical, and social struggles of the mother country will not hesitate to batter down the abuses of Muridism before a population to whom the development of education will have given more critical sense and a greater desire for social justice. But it is not desirable that such a struggle be instituted in Senegal.

[934] [935] Certainly the spell over the talibé by his marabout is criticizable. Nevertheless that must not make us forget that the Koran recommends charity and that the Murid marabouts are not wanting in respect for this precept; any sick person,

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*795 [734] [735] any poor person can go to them to ask for alms and hospitality; he will be taken care of for a long time, and for nothing, and thus part of the funds collected by the marabouts is redistributed to their faithful in misfortune.

One must especially not lose sight of the fact that Muridism is /30/ an integral part of Islam, even though it does not completely conform to orthodox Islam, even though it has abuses and faults. It is primarily a spiritual force, and it is necessary that political and social evolution, indispensable to the young country of Senegal, does not take place against Muridism, against Islam, against all spirituality.

*795 666 648 It is known that the Senegalese marabouts in general and the Murid leaders in particular, on the occasion of the Referendum of September 28, were definitely in favor of the Franco-African Community. This attitude can not be explained solely, as some might insinuate, by their desire to preserve certain relations with France, whose pro-Islamic policy has always been favorable and profitable for them. The true reason for this choice is that, on the one hand, the marabouts well know the present state of the intellectual and political development of their compatriots, and, on the other hand, they want to defend their religion and its spiritual values.

They know that at the present time the advanced wing of the political and syndicalist world groups together advanced young people who are quite far from any religious practice and thought and very violently pro-Marxist, if not pure Marxists.

They probably feared that, by means of an independence as premature as absolute, the present leaders, moderate on the whole, would be very quickly left behind by the extremists and that these would then institute in Senegal a materialistic and atheistic regime to which true and good Moslems would not be able to rally, and from which, probably, the whole of the population would rapidly suffer.

*795 But the development of this prospect would carry us too far. Let us content ourselves, in conclusion, to bring it up and to

/30 cont./

X795 suggest at the same time that a comprehensive collaboration is possible between Moslems and Christians (and, in a general way, all Occidental spiritualists) for instituting or defending a society where spiritual values will have first place.

There is nothing surprising about that. Is not Allah, the God of the Koran, the God of Abraham, the Yaweh of the Jews, who is also the God of the Christians? Is it not the same Being whom Moslems and Christians worship under different names, the same Being that they both pray to as their Divine Creator, Powerful and Merciful. If they have thus issued from a same Father, how could they not eventually respect each other, understand each other, and love each other?

Abel Bourlon.

2: Bourlon

MS37 Senegal
Wolof MS30

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[For a discussion of Muridism, its leaders and influence see category 116, pp. 1-27.]

2: Bourlon
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MS37 Senegal MS37

[For a discussion of Muridism, its leaders and influence see category 116, pp. 1-27.]